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Daughter turns grief into action by speaking at Homeward Bound walk

'Take care of the homeless for me,' Pat Lucas said before she died

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Last January, just four months after suffering the loss of her mother, Anita Foster e-mailed the co-chairwoman of the Homeward Bound walk and asked if she could some day serve as spokeswoman for the event — an annual Bloomington fundraiser that benefits local agencies fighting hunger and homelessness.

In the e-mail, Foster told the co-chairwoman, Kathy Mayer, she wanted to speak at the event to honor the legacy of her mother, Pat Lucas, who spent 40 years helping the hungry and homeless.

"Mom did the best she could raising four of us kids by herself," Foster. "At times we all lived in a car. We would not have survived without help from many of these agencies."

Kathy Mayer invited Foster to a meeting of the planning committee. At the meeting, Mayer announced she'd found the spokeswoman for this year's event.

"In fact, she's sitting right here," Mayer said, pointing to Foster.

Momma Pat

When Pat Lucas finally got on her feet financially, she devoted her life to helping others — working at Middle Way House, Salvation Army, Community Kitchen, Shelter Inc. and Martha's House.

During those years the people she served affectionately called her "Momma Pat" for the way in which she engulfed them with unconditional love, and for her willingness to house homeless people in her modest apartment.

"Mommy never wanted recognition for what she did," Foster said. "She just loved people. She always said everyone has a right to food and shelter."

But Foster said her mother spent most of her married life in fear for her life. "Once, my father held a knife to her neck and asked us kids if we wanted to watch her die," she said.

"Another time, after a neighbor gave us a horse, he came home drunk and shot the horse — then made us all watch it die."

'Take care of the homeless'

The day before Pat Lucas died in August 2008, Foster was at work at the Campaign Center — a company that raises money for national nonprofit organizations — when she got a call from her sister saying their mother, who'd been battling cancer for years, seemed to be slipping away.

Foster hurried to her mother's tiny westside apartment.

"She looked real weak and gray, but she was insisting that my sister clean the carpets," Foster said. "She said she was going home soon and didn't want to leave the carpets dirty."

Foster offered to stay with her that night, but Lucas said she needed to be alone.

"I kissed and hugged her and walked outside," Foster said. "Then something made me run back into her apartment, where I kissed her again. She looked at me and said, 'Take care of the homeless for me.'"

The next morning, Pat Lucas died.

'Let's take the long way'

On the way to the cemetery, pastor Bruce Rose of the Second Baptist Church turned to Foster and her sisters and said, "Girls, let's take the long way, and drive your mom past Martha's House and the Community Kitchen one last time."

They were amazed when they found dozens of people standing outside the two facilities — bowing, waving and saluting Momma Pat as the hearse drove by.

Foster said every year she's participated in the Homeward Bound walk, it has been in her mother's honor. "This year, I'll be walking in her memory."

Hope to raise \$70,000

Organizers of the 7th Annual Bloomington Homeward Bound 5K walk, which will begin at noon April 19 at the Third Street Park, hope to raise \$70,000 this year, \$6,000 more than last year's event, which drew 500 walkers.

Since its inception in 2003, the Bloomington walk has raised \$325,000, and similar walks throughout the state have raised \$2.5 million. This year, there will be 11 walks in Indiana.

For the Bloomington event, individuals or teams can participate. They can give money, solicit pledges or do both.

Participants can register or donate online at <http://homewardboundindiana.org/bloomington> — or the day of the event at a registration table at Third Street Park.

They can designate where they want their donation to go, or simply ask that their donation go into a general fund to be distributed evenly among the 12 recipient agencies.

Those agencies are: Amethyst House, Area 10 Agency on Aging, Center for Behavioral Health, Community Kitchen, Hoosier Hills Food Bank, Martha's House, Middle Way House, Monroe County United Ministries, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, Shalom Community Center, Stepping Stones and Youth Services Bureau of Monroe County.

During the 3 1/2-hour event, children can play games and make crafts at Kid's Island. King Bee and the Stingers and other groups will provide live music, and free food will be provided by the Lions Club.

There will be an award ceremony at which Anita Foster will speak and a traveling trophy and gift certificates from local businesses will be given to various teams for such things as raising the most money.

The walk is sponsored by the City of Bloomington, Community and Family Resource Department, Indiana University, Ivy Tech and the 12 local social service agencies.

About the walk

WHAT: 7th Annual Bloomington Homeward Bound 5K walk

WHEN & WHERE: Noon on Sunday, April 19, at Third Street Park

HOW IT WORKS: Individuals or teams can participate. They can give money, solicit pledges or do both. Participants can register or make donations online at <http://homewardboundindiana.org/bloomington> — or the day of the event at a registration table at Third Street Park.

WHO BENEFITS: Participants can designate a specific agency or agencies they wish their donation to go to, or ask that their donation go into a general fund to be distributed evenly among the 12 recipient agencies: Amethyst House, Area 10 Agency on Aging, Center for Behavioral Health, Community Kitchen, Hoosier Hills Food Bank, Martha's House, Middle Way House, Monroe County United Ministries, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard, Shalom Community Center, Stepping Stones and Youth Services Bureau of Monroe County.

MORE: During the 3 1/2-hour event, children can play games and make crafts at Kid's Island. King Bee and the Stingers and other groups will provide live music, and free food will be provided by the local Lions Club. There will be an award ceremony at which Anita Foster will speak and a traveling trophy and gift certificates from local businesses will be given to various teams for such things as raising the most money.

